

## A record of the Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* in Darwin, Northern Territory

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The introduced Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* is abundant in southern and eastern Australia, from Eyre Peninsula, South Australia, throughout Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales to Brisbane, Queensland (Blakers *et al.* 1984). It is apparently still extending its range west and north. In Queensland it is resident and breeding in small numbers in Mackay (R. Farnes pers. comm.); however records north of there (about 20°S) are sporadic. Blakers *et al.* (1984) record it breeding as far north as Cairns, though it is an irregular or rare visitor there. One Common Starling was reported from near Cairns in October 1997 (K. & L. Fisher pers. comm.). It is occasionally reported from Townsville (I. Clayton, J. Wieneke pers. comm.). Several (8-10) Common Starlings were present at Merinda Meatworks, north of Bowen from about 1988 until they were eradicated by Queensland National Parks & Wildlife Service in 1997 (J. Wren pers. comm.).

As a vagrant, the Common Starling has been recorded almost as far west in Queensland as Camooweal (19°55'S, 138°07'E) in October 1966 (Smith 1970), and north to Iron Range (12°47'S, 143°18'E) in October 1974 (Forshaw & Muller 1975). It has also occurred as a vagrant in Port Moresby, New Guinea (Beehler *et al.* 1986). Two Common Starlings were shot at Broome, Western Australia, in June 1988 and March 1990 (Collins 1995). In the Northern Territory, Blakers *et al.* (1984) show a single record east north-east of Alice Springs near the Queensland border but give no details of this isolated report in their text.

On 22 June 1996 the author observed a starling in flight at Darwin sewage works. A starling was seen again at the site on 29 June and this time it perched on overhead electricity wires, enabling closer views and confirmation of its identity as Common Starling. The bird was also seen by NM and R. Noske later that day. It was not seen again despite regular visits to the site.

Storr (1977) does not mention Common Starling for the Northern Territory and other than the record in Blakers *et al.* (1984) there is no published account of its occurrence there. Certainly it seems an improbable bird to appear in Darwin and its provenance is of some interest. Although Long (1981) suggests that Common Starling tends to be sedentary in Australia there are records of long-distance migration (e.g. Storr 1983) and vagrancy (see above). It is possible that the bird was a vagrant

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from the northern hemisphere, where the species has been recorded as a non-breeding visitor as far south as central Thailand (Lekagul & Round 1991). However such birds would be expected to show eclipse plumage whereas the Darwin bird was in breeding plumage, which is more consistent with Australian birds for that time of year. Thus it seems most likely that the bird arrived as a transported migrant, by ship or road transport from the south-east of Australia.

There is little evidence to suggest that Common Starling pose an invasive threat to tropical areas of the Northern Territory, especially given the paucity of records from northern Australia. The most 'tropical' resident population appears to be in Jamaica (c. 18°N; Bond 1990). The species is a winter visitor in Mexico as far south as Veracruz (also c. 18°N; Davis 1972). In the Pacific, Common Starling has become established on some of the southern Lau islands of Fiji (c. 20°S; Clunie 1984) but it has not colonised more northerly areas of the south-west Pacific (Clunie 1984, Bregulla 1992, Watling 1982).

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